Round 2: Readers supp

The real issue is legal equality

YOU PUBLISHED 10 letters (July 1), nine of them from women, regarding Ramona Santorelli's action on June 21 in defiance of a law which blatantly discriminates against women.

The letters curiously supported this discrimination by overtly ignoring the stated intention of Santorelli and the other women — to raise awareness of an issue that extends far beyond that of the right to bare one's chest in public.

Only one issue should be considered in light of this challenge to law: Can a statute be allowed to stand when, contrary to the Constitution, it applies or is applied to one sex and not to the other?

Some of the letter writers failed to deal at all with this central point. For example, Dorothy Livadas wrote: "It is difficult for me to believe that erasing such a law would help solve society's unhealthy preoccupation with sex."

Sex is precisely not the issue here. Sexual difference, as the law views it, is. Our sexuality, male and female, should not be used as a means to suppress the rights of one half of the population.

This point leads into Gladys R. Beaty's letter: "I do not think it is right that they (the protesters) expect and want to be arrested so they can take legal action. Not a very good American thought, is it?"

One wonders if this writer can possibly be serious. The right to assembly and to force legal action is fundamental to our civil rights. Without it, all social protest would be weakened if not crippled. This country owes the integrity of its social conscience to those who, like Susan B. Anthony, not only risked but demanded arrest.

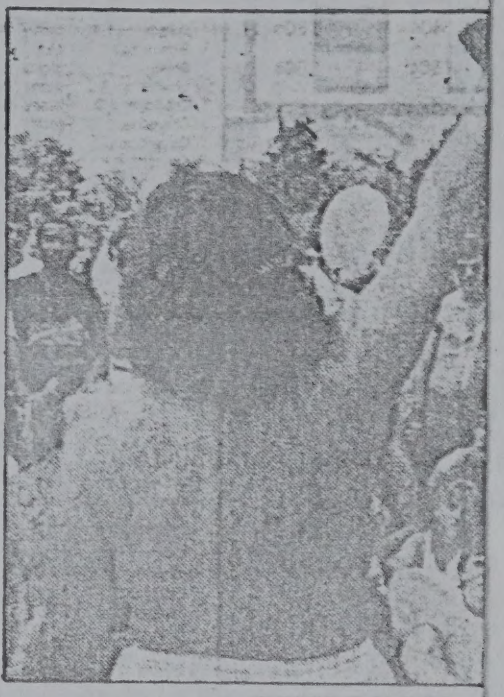
While the greater question here concerns legalities, the underlying principle is that of equality of difference. Admittedly it is a concept difficult to grasp in a world which places woman in second place, devalues her difference as well as her sameness, and in the name of law, exercises the "right" to deny to her what it "naturally" accords to her brothers.

Is it a "good American thought" to combat such denial by legal means? Indeed it is!

Robert L. Mazzola Rochester

End sexist culture

LET'S FACE IT squarely and honestly for once. The majority of our lawmakers are men. They have always been in the position to dictate to women how they should behave emotionally and physically.



Nikki Craft baring her chest in front of cr

Need proof? Look at the abortion issue, the treatment of women rape victims, battered women, and the sexual abuse of girl children.

Think about the fact that women are "allowed" to go topless at bars patronized by men solely for the purpose of male pleasure. Think about the fact that rape is not a sexual crime but a violent, misogynist (woman-hating) crime. All women who are raped and tortured by men are fully clothed.

What that group of women did at Cobb's Hill was brave and admirable. It also placed them in grave personal risk.

For our planet to survive, all sexist culture must cease.

Lori Matocha Rochester

Educate the gawkers

I COMMEND Nikki Craft (June 22) for her vision of a society free from sexual basis and her efforts, however fruitless, to achieve that vision.

But I do not agree with her method and believe that she is off the mark in her reasoning. Men and women are primarily sexual beings and breasts are an outward sign of that sexuality. The mistake comes from over-emphasizing anyone's or anything's sexual role, be it a woman or man.

Ms. Craft's efforts should focus on the re-education of attitudes. It is difficult for

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OPINION 2

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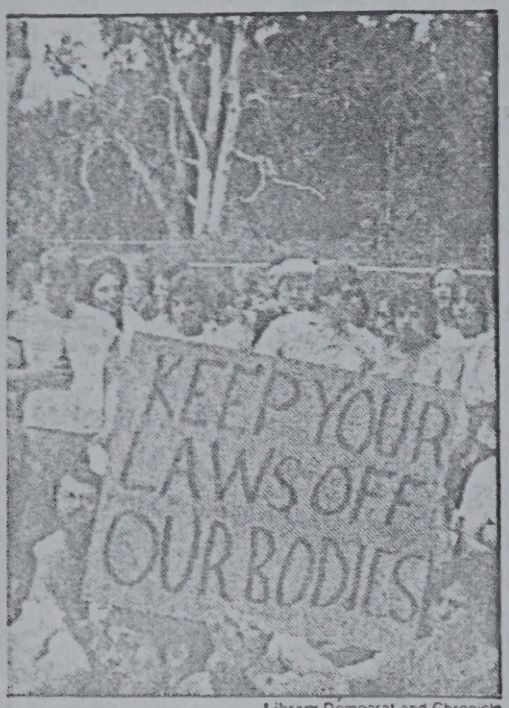

Library Democrat and Chronicle

wd in Cobbs Hill Park last month.

people, men especially, to reconcile the view of breasts as nurturing parts of a women's body to the sexual view of them.

Trying to get society to view breasts as simply excessive chest tissue is misunderstanding the complexity of the issue. Ms. Craft's protesting is noble and gallant, but serves little purpose and only brings the gawkers out in full force to turn her vision into mockery.

Mary Grace Valentinsson Rochester

Protest for change

AS ONE OF the women who recently challenged the New York state law requiring women but not men to cover their chests in public, I am writing to respond to issues raised in letters to the editor on July 1.

One woman wrote that she couldn't believe any of us have experienced "the joy of breast-feeding a baby." Another woman calls us naive, stating that if "breasts were not a sexually provocative area *Playboy* . . . would have been out of business years ago."

Well, I have experienced the joy of breast feeding and am now raising daughters in a society that treats women's breasts as sex objects.

A major reason that I participated in the top-free protest was to begin to change society's attitudes toward women's bodies.

All women should be proud of their bodies. A woman's worth should not be defined by the shape of her breasts. The sight of real women's breasts of all shapes and sizes will help people accept themselves as they are.

Our top-free picnic attracted far more media attention than we anticipated. It was the arrival of the police in uniform with numerous marked cars and a paddy wagon over an hour before most of the women arrived that drew the crowd of voyeurs. It was like putting up a billboard announcing the location of the "show."

The issue of priorities was raised by several writers. I would agree that the right of women to garden, sun or swim without a top is not as important an issue as world peace, world hunger or apartheid.

Most of the other women and I have been and will continue to be involved in those issues. However, I believe that the small step we took toward changing attitudes about women's bodies and eliminating a discriminatory law is important.

Mary Lou Schloss Rochester

Disgusting journalism

WHAT DISGUST I felt when I saw the headline story (June 22) on the bare-breasted "issue." I can take a joke and the girls were amusing, but the space spent on press coverage was disgusting. *National Geographic* you ain't!

It will probably make every other predictable piece of "rag" read like advanced journalism. But you are predictable — surprise me sometime!

A. Winkler Rochester

Circus in the park

WOMEN WHO bare their breasts in a public park may claim that they are doing it for the good of our children, because breasts are beautiful, or because they don't want their civil liberties interfered with.

But the bottom line is that they do have breasts, that breasts are erotic in our society, and that baring them is a sexual act. The only remedy is for women to have their breasts removed, or for men to suddenly stop viewing them as part of a woman's sexuality. Neither is likely to occur, so the end result of the breast-baring is a circus in which women exploit themselves.

If these women are successful, the next decade might well bring other freedoms. A day in the park might include copulating couples as entertainment while we munch on our hamburgers.

Where is our dignity and self-respect?

Lynne Harvey Rochester

Miss Corio's dictum

IF THE AMATEUR strippers on Cobbs Hill want a good repeat audience they might take a tip from Ann Corio, once "the highest priced undressed woman in America."

Miss Corio's dictum was, "Never take off your pants, and the boys will come back the next night thinking you will."

Henry W. Clune Scottsville

Breasts out of place

IT APPEARS that the women who removed their shirts in Cobbs Hill park are becoming more notorious as each day passes. I feel that we have lost sight of the basic issue.

The human body has always been considered something beautiful and special. When it's shared, either personally or as a work of art, this sharing is accepted and respected when it is in the proper context. Taken out of context, it becomes offensive.

Let me illustrate the point using the human eye as an example. Very often, a person's eyes are his most striking feature. Some people have "beautiful" eyes. However, if you removed those eyes and put them on a plate, they would be ugly and disgusting because they have been taken out of their context.

To me, those women in the park did the same thing. They took something beautiful and special and threw it out on the table like a piece of meat. It was totally out of place.

Hugh C. Franklin Penfield

Amen to freedom

LEE KRENIS' insightful comments (June 29) regarding the so-called Cobb's Hill 7 not only touched the heart of the issue of public exposure, but also nailed the "most of us" whose thoughts and opinions are not yet focused or fixed.

The headline appears to capsulize and crystalize the issue — it isn't breasts, it's freedom. As her grandmother might have said, amen.

Thomas P. Proietti Rochester

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Your original letters about current issues are welcome. We reserve the right to edit for reasons of space, clarity and fair play. Only your name and city or town will be published but your full address and telephone number must be included for verification purposes. Mail to Letters to the Editor, Democrat and Chronicle, *55 Exchange Blvd., Rochester, N. Y. 14614.*